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Alarm Bells Need Fixing



By Lyle C. Wilson

THERE must be something wrong with the alarm bells in the Department of State. Sometimes they fail to ring out the alarm.

All bells should have rung long and loudly in November 1956, when a United Nations diplomat tried to alert the authorities and the State Department that there was great trouble at the United Nations and that Soviet Union agents had infiltrated the United States intelligence service.

The UN diplomat was Povl Bang-Jensen, formerly a member of the Danish Foreign Service and well known to State Department foreign service officers. Mr. Bang-Jensen is dead. The word he sought to pass was that the Soviet Union had infiltrated the high command of the United Nations as well as U. S. intelligence. The record available indicates, also, that Mr. Bang-Jensen knew of one or more Soviet Nationals in the United Nations who wanted to defect to the United States.

Specifically, Mr. Bang-Jensen wanted to tell his story to Allen W. Dulles, chief of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which organization allegedly had been infiltrated by Soviet agents. The Dane began in November, 1956, to bid for a chance to talk with Mr. Dulles. When nothing happened, Mr. Bang-Jensen persisted into June, 1957. Mr. Dulles was unaware of this until May 3, 1957.

The Senate Internal Security sub-committee reported this week on its investigation of the Bang-Jensen case. The report is adversely critical of the State Department. It finds

no fault with CIA nor with the FBI for failure to bore into the Bang-Jensen mystery when the first word of it reached those agencies. On the contrary:

"Since this was a highly sensitive matter involving the United Nations," the sub-committee report said, "both the CIA and the FBI took the stand that they could not act without higher authorization from the State Department. The only action called for was a simple suggestion from State to Mr. Allen Dulles that he listen to what Mr. Bang-Jensen had to say."

"But for some reason this suggestion was not forthcoming. The result was that nothing was done. From the standpoint of national security, the entire record in dealing with Mr. Bang-Jensen's request must be considered a lamentable example of procrastination and indecision."

"Matters such as this cannot be permitted to wait for months or even weeks before a simple decision is made to receive the information."

This is not light and casual criticism. It raises a question as to what kind of a tip to the State Department about a threat to the U. S. national security would be sufficient to get action. If the Department's alarm bell did not ring on Mr. Bang-Jensen's tip, what would make it ring?

This episode did not turn out well for Mr. Bang-Jensen, either. Much of the sub-committee investigation sought to determine whether Mr. Bang-Jensen committed suicide, as the New York police reported, or was murdered by Soviet agents because he knew too much. The mystery remains.

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